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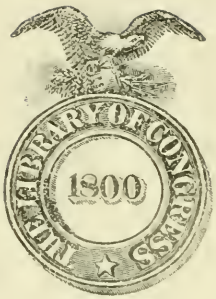
WEST NEWTON
HALF A CENTURY AGO

LUCY ELLIS ALLEN



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BY

LUCY ELLIS ALLEN

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DEDICATED

TO

The Lucy Jackson Chapter, D. A. R.

OF WEST NEWTON

WEST NEWTON HALF A CENTURY AGO

"We watch the flights of the sun through space, shortening winter and bringing spring and summer, with birds, leaves and fruits, and yet it is not half as wonderful as the passage of a human soul, glowing and sparkling with ten thousand effects as it moves through life, carrying its atmosphere and influence, as does Nature."

Man is indeed a force producer and force bearer, journeying forward and exhaling influences on all sides.— But once the *good* man appears, his power is irresistible and such was the case in West Newton some half a century ago, when there came to this little village such men and wo-

men as most of us have heard of, since childhood.

"Their presence made sunshine and right living easy, their coming changed the climate and their influence can never wholly die — "

At that period which we are considering, the world was alive to the greatest interests; education, freeing of the slaves, temperance, and true government. In all these questions, West Newton men and women took a lively interest and gave the village the reputation of being a most progressive community.

Among the noble group who called West Newton their home, the name of Horace Mann stands first; a man who chose as his topic for consideration when graduating from college: "The Progressive Character of the Human Race."

All are undoubtedly familiar with the spot where Horace Mann's

house once stood at the corner of Chestnut and Highland Streets, where now the Saffords reside. Horace Mann was a member of the House of Representatives in Massachusetts and served on the State Senate, at an earlier period; and through his personal exertions, Massachusetts established a *Board* of Education and Mr. Mann was at once placed at its head as Secretary. During his residence in West Newton, in addition to other duties, he wrote the reports of the board for the people of the State. These reports discussed in a forcible manner, many new questions on education and they had a great influence in elevating the standard of public sentiment and of school instruction, not only in Massachusetts, but throughout the whole country and world, as they were published in many languages. His earnestness in advocating new methods and new

plans started the great movement in public school education, which is more strikingly American, than any system which we call *American* in distinction from others called European.

Besides his work as Secretary of the Educational Board, he had general care and superintendence of the erection of three Normal School buildings. Mr. Mann in speaking of his service said: "I labored in this educational cause an average of not less than fifteen hours each day, and from the beginning to the end, (eleven years) never took a single day for recreation." Some educational errand was sure to be his object if he visited any friend. In 1847, he wrote to an old friend, of his home in West Newton: "I have built a house for myself at this place, which will gladden your hearts. I have been a wanderer for twenty years

and when asked where I lived, I answered: 'I do not live anywhere, I board.' This Arab life I could bear while alone, but when I had 'wife and weans', it became intolerable. We have therefore put up a shelter in West Newton, ten miles from Boston and within one hundred rods of the West Newton Woman's Normal School." Here he lived delightfully with his family and the little ones whom he never could turn his back upon. It is said that the only natural outlet for his native hilarity was his love of children, and this resource was all that saved him when the outside world seemed bent upon thwarting his educational aims. The children, too, on their part, thought no play was so charming as that in which their father partook. He did not know how to tell fairy tales, nor did he approve of them, but he could bring the wonders of Nature within the compass of their

admiring little souls. To cultivate the religious character of his children, irrespective of dogma, for he was a most progressive and liberal thinker, was his aim; and it was the happiest of thoughts to him that his children could make God a sharer of their joys and an object of personal affection and confidence, as the loving *heavenly* parent, who made father, mother, and the butterfly alike.

A charming group of literary friends shared the home of Mr. Mann. Mrs. Mann herself was a most cultured and refined woman, a daughter of Dr. Peabody of Salem, an authoress of some distinction, while always sharing and assisting in her husband's educational duties. Mrs. Mann had with her a sister, Miss Elizabeth Peabody, the pioneer and interpreter of Frőebel to the Americans. Altho ' opposed on all sides and ridiculed in her early work, she persevered to the end and lived to

enjoy the distinction of the greatest woman, not only in Boston but America, in enforcing the Kindergarten movement, which today we are all so familiar with. The famous Elizabeth Peabody School in Boston is only one preservative of her persistent and triumphant work. Miss Katharine Beecher, the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher lived also at the home of Mr. Mann, and Miss Rebecca Pennell, a remarkable teacher of Mathematics in the Normal School and later professor at Antioch College. Mr. and Mrs. Conant, too, added their influence and inspiration to the household, during the time that Mr. Conant assisted Mr. Chesboro, who is spoken of later in his engineering work in bringing water from Cochituate to Boston.

Suddenly owing to the death of John Quincy Adams, came the demand for Mr. Mann's services as representative

to the National Congress. It was an important crisis in the cause of liberty, for slavery was then to be stemmed or allowed to extend itself indefinitely, for a champion as fearless and persistent as Mr. Mann was needed. Mr. Mann at first felt that he could not leave Massachusetts, but upon reflection, he saw that the new office had bearings upon *the* great cause of freedom, and he allowed himself to be persuaded. His friends were glad to have him leave his educational labors for a time, for his plans were so vast, that no man could live under such pressure.

Some few years after Mr. Mann left West Newton, his home was occupied by his brother-in-law Nathaniel Hawthorne, for Mr. Mann's wife and Elizabeth Peabody, were the sisters of Mrs. Hawthorne. Mr. Hawthorne had just come from the famous Brook Farm Community in West Roxbury, so

similar in idea to the Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey Pantisocracy, in the beautiful English Lakes about Grasmere and Keswick. While in West Newton, Hawthorne penned his "Blithedale Romance," it is said, and altho' the author does not deny that he had the Brook Farm Community in mind and occasionally availed himself of actual reminiscence, he claims that he had no *pretence* to illustrate a theory or elicit a conclusion in respect to a Socialistic scheme. Surely we find no Ripley in the "Blithedale Romance," with whom rests the "honorable paternity of the institution," no Dana, Channing, Parker and others among his characters. Still are we not satisfied that one book even was written in our little village before Hawthorne went to his Concord home or the Old Manse? His was ever a life of retirement and so like "the young champions of mediaeval times, on the

eve of Knighthood, he was shut up alone, to watch and pray beside his armor." This man turned human beings into philosophy and philosophy into human beings, awakening, as it is said, a new birth of literature in America, of which we are justly proud.

Mrs. Lydia Maria Childs became a resident of West Newton too, living with her husband David Lee Childs at the corner of Chestnut and Fuller Streets, after leaving New York, where she had been editor of the "Anti-Slavery Standard", while in New York, she had lived at the home of the genial philanthropist, Isaac T. Hopper, whose biography she wrote in West Newton and which is one of the most readable pieces of biography in English literature. Here, too, she wrote and worked on the "Progress of Religious Ideas", which is an attempt to represent in a candid, unprejudiced manner, the rise and progress of the

great religions of the world and their ethical relations to each other. She must not be regarded only from a literary point of view, for she was so wise in counsel that men like Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson and Governor John Andrew, as well as the destitute, availed themselves of her foresight and sound judgment. As Lowell says of her: —

"There comes Philothea, her face all aglow,
She has just been dividing some poor creature's woe,
No doubt against many deep griefs she prevails,
For her ear is the refuge of destitute tales;
She knows well that silence is sorrow's best food,
And that talking draws off from the heart its black blood."

From West Newton, Mrs. Childs also

wrote a criticism of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which Mrs. Harriet B. Stowe had been roused to write after the passage of the Fugitive Slave law and of which Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote: "I, as a woman and human being, rejoice in its success. If a woman has no business to write of such questions, she had better subside into slavery herself and take no rank among thinkers and reformers." Certainly "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was a sign of the times and Mrs. Childs from the first had taken active interest in Slave matters, as had Horace Mann and others in West Newton. Mr. Nathaniel Allen's house on Webster Street was one of the "Underground Stations" in Massachusetts and Mr. Allen stood ready to act as one of William Lloyd Garrison's body guard in Boston or take the slave to Bedford, the next underground station to that in West Newton.

The Normal School which Mr. Mann spoke of as living within one hundred rods from in West Newton had been started in 1845. The subject of Normal Schools had become the most important one of Mr. Mann's life, at an earlier date, and when he finally succeeded in starting that at Lexington five years previously, he wrote: "Tomorrow we go to Lexington to launch the first Normal School for *Women* on this side of the Atlantic. I cannot indulge in an expression of the train of thoughts which the contemplation of this event awakens in my mind. *Much* must come of it, either of good or of ill, I am sanguine in my faith that it will be the former. The good will not come itself,—that is the reward of effort, of toil, of wisdom."

The Normal School at Lexington was about to be closed after five years and the project, "ridiculed and opposed," was likely to be discon-

tinued, for even in Boston, the so-called Athens of America, the wealthier class, with few exceptions of course, cared not for any reforms or interests toward promoting popular education. Mr. Mann was not to be baffled, and called at the office of Mr. Josiah Quincy, Jr., as a last resource and in his striking manner said: "If you know any man who wishes the highest seat in the kingdom of heaven, it is to be had for $1500.," by that he meant the purchase of the West Newton Fuller Academy, which building was till a few years ago, located on the corner of Washington and Highland Streets, where now the Unitarian Church stands. Mr. Quincy before rising from his desk, drew his check for the amount, and so the Normal School for Women was started in West Newton.

When in Lexington, Mr. Mann had secured as principal of the Normal

School, Mr. Cyrus Pierce, a graduate of Harvard, native of Waltham, once Unitarian minister in Reading and a very successful teacher in Nantucket. Mr. Mann considered Mr. Pierce the man of all teachers in Massachusetts, who was fitted to carry on the Normal School, for he lived the life of intellectual work, of uplifted thought and noble, generous feeling. A man who was such an indefatigable and painstaking worker that he slept at most only five hours, working the rest of the twenty-four, for he not only acted as principal, but he was his own janitor. *He* it was who came to West Newton as principal of the Normal School for Women. He not only knew how to teach with precision, but he evoked from his pupils, such a force of conscience as insured thorough study and assimilation of whatever was taught. Mr. Pierce's students, by their mental habits, which were con-

scientious, exact, reliable, were said to be known wherever they were met. His whole meaning in life was embraced in the motto with which he daily closed his school: "Live to the truth, my children".

Many young ladies from the first families and best society of Boston and the State were attracted to this school and up to within a few years ago, we had in our midst, the woman who became "Father Pierce's" assistant and co-worker, Mrs. E. N. L. Walton, who later came here to live with her husband, Mr. George Walton, who was on the State Board of Education, and an educator always.

If to Mr. Mann the *conception* was due, Mr. Pierce *settled* the problem of the Normal School system against *all* and every kind of opposition. Here, too, the "Model School," under Mr. Nathaniel T. Allen, gave the normal pupils practical lessons in teaching the

children of the community and here Mr. Pierce acquired the name "Father Pierce," for his face was said to be similar to the great Fröebel and later in life it was said to be a benediction to look upon his face, so benign and beautiful was it.

In 1854 the Normal School was moved to Framingham and the building in West Newton was purchased for a private school by Mr. Nathaniel T. Allen and he associated with him "Father Pierce". Mr. Horace Mann took especial interest in the development of this private school for Mr. Allen had lived with Mr. Mann at an earlier time.

The building became quite historic in the eyes of the oldest citizens, first as an academy, given the town by Judge Fuller; second, as the first Normal School building for Women in the World and the model school connected with it, as it was termed the

most distinguished *model* school in the country; and third, for a private school of fifty years' standing, unique in having but one man, Nathaniel T. Allen, at the head all those years.

It was distinctly an Allen School in name, for Mr. Allen connected with him an uncle, three brothers, George, James, Joseph, at different times; several cousins, nephews, nieces and daughters. Many of these men and women have held very high positions in the educational world in colleges and schools, have edited and written books on education, religion, history and politics.

To this school came nearly five thousand pupils from every state and territory of the Union, all countries of North and South America, the islands off the coast; many of the European countries and even from Asia. For the first Japanese, Cubans and Porto Ricans it is supposed, who came for

educational purposes to the United States attended the Allen School. In connection with it as a private school, Dr. Dio Lewis and Mr. William A. Alcott were invited by Mr. Allen to give their lectures on physical culture and physiology. So intense was the enthusiasm that not only the young people of the school, but men and women from all parts of Newton joined in the exercises and the so called " Town Hall " had to be resorted to as a gymnasium, prior to that built in connection with the Allen School, which had the distinction of being one of the first gymnasiums in the country, built in connection with a preparatory school. Here, too, the first roller skates were tested by the inventor, Mr. James L. Plimpton, a cousin of the Allens, which form of exercise has always been so popular in all cities and towns.

In 1863, through the influence of

Baroness Marenholtz von Bulow, the pupil and interpreter of Fröebel, Mrs. Louise Pollock was secured from Germany by Mr. James Allen to open the first kindergarten in the United States, and so the Allen School had children of all ages connected with it and the nature studies and sciences held such an important place in the curriculum of the school, that there have emanated from the school many of our distinguished scientific men. Mr. Mann *amusingly* said to Mr. Allen, who had been a pupil of Louis Agassiz, that he should charge him freightage on his son's trunks, when he moved to Ohio; they were so loaded down with specimens of minerals!

The building was *always* used for all meetings of reform in the village, such as Anti Slavery and Free Soil meetings, and one of the first Civil Service Clubs in Massachusetts was here organized.

Besides Horace Mann, Cyrus Pierce, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lydia Maria Childs, West Newton had many others who were closely connected and interested in all that tended toward reform and the uplifting of the community.

Mr. William B. Fowle was one, a most distinguished educator and author, who might have been the principal too of the Normal School.

Rev. Joseph Clark another, who became Secretary of the Home Mission Society and whose son, educated in West Newton, has been secretary of the same society in New York.

Mr. John Dix, editor of the Boston Journal, was an able thinker and coworker on all subjects before the world; while Mr. J. W. Plimpton, always generous and noble, stood ready to assist by word, deed or open purse, every good object and cause, as did Mr. John Ayers, Mr. David Howland and others who were attracted to West

Newton around this time, all Theodore Parkerites, progressive and liberal.

A charming woman too, lived on Waltham Street, after the death of her husband, Mr. Whitwell, a lawyer of Boston, and her father, the man who owned all that portion of Boston called Scollay Square. This was Mrs. Lucy Scollay Whitwell, whose interest in life was healthful and wise, because of the purity and beauty of her spirit. Her daughter, who had been an assistant to Mr. George B. Emerson in his famous school in Boston, married a man of marked ability Mr. William Parker, who, with Mr. Mann, Mr. Nathaniel Allen and others did so much in starting the Unitarian Church in West Newton. Mr. Parker, when a resident here, was superintendent of the Boston and Worcester Railroad, later he became superintendent of the Boston and Lowell and again of the Baltimore and Ohio. Many anecdotes are con-

nected with him which show his true worth and popularity as a man. When about to leave for Panama, where he was called to superintend the building of a railroad, he was given silver of all descriptions, by the employees of the railroads he had been connected with, and later after assisting the nephew of Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III, to escape for South America, he was awarded by Napoleon, a ring in which were fifty-six diamonds, which is highly prized by the children and grandchildren, who now live in Boston, New York and California. Not only did he assist the nephew to escape, but also the slaves whom he allowed to pass over the Baltimore and Ohio, to freedom in the north. The son of Mrs. Whitwell was a most eminent engineer and remarkable scientist. While in West Newton, he was appointed chief engineer of the Boston water works and together with

Mr. Chesboro, who came to live in West Newton at the corner of Webster and Elm Streets, they undertook the then great task of bringing water from Cochituate to Boston. Mr. Chesboro had charge from Cochituate to Brookline and Mr. Whitwell from Brookline to Boston. Mr. Chesboro also is remembered as having achieved the remarkable feat of lifting the whole city of Chicago, twelve to fifteen feet, and thus improving the sanitary condition of the city. Again he was employed by Boston as consulting engineer for the Sudbury works, which brought a greater supply of water for Boston.

These men and women, and such families as the Barnards, Bonds, Burrages, Carters, Frosts, Pratts, Thatchers, Thurstons, Tolmans and Tiffanys, who came to West Newton about this time, were anxious for the *good* of the whole world. They did not make

their motto: "Come right, come wrong, we shall get *gain* alone," they did not allow their professional duties to interfere with the cultivation of their minds. In other words, they did not deny their ears music, their minds culture, nor their hearts friendship, but connected themselves with Nature, Art, and *Literary Classes,* and all that was uplifting to the community in which they lived, sensitive to the meaning of life, *giving* and *receiving* alike and spreading the *refining* influence.

Attracted by such a galaxy of broadening men and women, Mrs. Caroline Dall came to West Newton with her husband and son. A woman whose life always was given to literature and advancement. Her husband was a Unitarian minister of eminence and spent many years as a liberal missionary in India. The son, Mr. William Dall is perhaps as remark-

able as any who were educated in the Allen School, as he is known throughout the scientific world as a publisher of many scientific papers, and has been professor and curator of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

Mrs. Caroline Seaverance was also attracted to our community, the woman who has the distinction of being called the "Mother" of Women's Clubs, for she founded the first club of Boston, as Mrs. Nathaniel Allen and Mrs. Walton did the first in Newton.

Half a century ago, Newtonville, or Hull's Corner so called, was more closely connected with West Newton than perhaps at the present time, for Newtonville, West Newton, and Auburndale, too, were united educationally and religiously. On the Bemis side of Newton, on the banks of the beautiful Charles river, lived

the charming writer, Celia Thaxter, who has made the scenes about the Isles of Shoals so fascinating and familiar. Mrs. Thaxter and her children came often to West Newton, the children for their schooling at Allen School, and all, as lovers of nature, for their walks in the woods near Chestnut and Prince Streets, where no longer are found the trailing arbutus, blood root and blossoms so beautiful. Mrs. Thaxter felt that at all seasons the woods afforded more than a shopful of toys could, for the education of her children, and they at once began to question: "Whence came the color of the flowers; How did they draw their sweet and refreshing tint from the brown earth," etc., etc.? In a letter written to a friend she speaks of having a "gulf stream of visitors" in that nook of Newton which all seemed to find so delightful, for excursions were taken up and

down the Charles, "among lily pads and spikes of purple pickerel weed, exploring brooks and inlets and loading the boat with flowers to be analyzed later."

Near the Newton High School, now where the Technical School is, we were all familiar with the beautiful Claflin Estate, historical as the residence of General Hull and where Rev. James Freeman Clarke made frequent visits. The last half century it has been known as the home of Ex-Governor and Mrs. Claflin, both literary people in their tastes and there Mrs. Claflin wrote her charming book, "Under the Elms." There, too, the Claflins always entertained an assembly of remarkable people, from the Presidents of the United States to poets, literary, artistic and scientific people:—Harriet B. Stowe, Whittier, Charles Sumner, Kate Field and others.

In Newton Centre, lived Rev. Samuel F. Smith, author of "America", who used frequently to come to West Newton to see his old teacher, Seth Davis, who lived to be a centenarian and until 92 years old, walked to Boston each birthday and took delight in casting the first vote at each city election. He it was who helped to plant and beautify our town with its elms and maples.

Mr. Theodore Parker lived for a time in Auburndale in those early days and married his wife from the old Cabot estate, where the charming women, the Misses Shannon have since lived. The latter with Mrs. Mary Goddard and Mrs. Eldridge in their cultivated, refined way spread their charities far and wide—indeed their generosity radiated in every direction and through their helpfulness came their great happiness.

It is not necessary for the rich man

or woman alone to accomplish the results we wish. Carlyle says that the greatest gospel one can have is "To *know* thy work and *do* it." "The spoken word, the written poem," he says, "is the epitome of man, but how much more the accomplished work. Whatsoever of morality and of intelligence, what of patience, perseverance, faithfulness; what of method, insight, ingenuity and energy; in a word, whatsoever of strength the man had in him will be written in the *work* he does." Another writer, Hamilton Mabie says: "The life of a great people is both inward and outward, i. e. life of the spirit and action." "We live in our ideas and we express our ideas by the things we do. Yet no man knows where he stands or what his life means till he knows the relative position of other men and what they have done. The larger vision comes by touching with influences outside of

our own, and then is added to it, directness, vigor and independence."

So the impetus given by such men and women as have been mentioned, led the residents of West Newton, to start the Newton Hospital, the Pomroy Home for Orphan and Destitute Girls, the Newton Athæneum and Library, the scientific form of Associated Charity giving, and all such charities as we are proud to know Newton has.

And as we are all placed in the world to fulfill a mission, as Carlyle says, and altho' many die without seeing the fruitage of the work, others enter into their labors, influenced and encouraged by those who preceded them.

Should we not be proud of those who made our village and city what it is, and should we not, as a younger generation, follow the law of helpfulness, which asks each one to

carry himself so as to bless and not blight men, to make and not mar them, to keep to the reputation of fifty years ago, of having West Newton distinguished as a most progressive and enlightened community?

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